You'd Be Better Off Without

Police

residents

Money

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A Short Intro To Anarchism

ALEX BRADSHAW

the assumption that a human becomes inferior at a certain age (ageism), ethnocentricity, eurocentricity, ableism, or the "othering" of individuals with so-called disabilities who perceive reality differently or move about in space differently than the majority. The list goes on endlessly.

If you don't see commonalities within the list, I'll point out that they all represent hierarchical social relations (domination). They represent the same "power over" social relations embodied by capitalism, which creates economic classes, and the state, which creates divides between citizens and governors.

The anarchist's job is to find hierarchy wherever she can, diagnose it, and do something about it.

"I'm Sold! How do I Become an Anarchist?"

The good news is if you value equality and freedom, do not care for the police or your boss, think humans would generally choose to cooperate and work together left to their own devices, and desire human relationships stripped of alienation, commodification, and domination you probably are an anarchist.

No self-identified anarchists could actually define what makes a "real" anarchist. There're no membership cards, and a fair share of the organizations are informal.

I might be so bold to suggest that a common trait of anarchist organizing involves creating the conditions we want to see in the here-and-now. So, anarchists create projects like political prisoner letter-writing campaigns, radical lending libraries and infoshops, or radical labor unions, that organize non-hierarchically or without formal leaders. Equality and freedom is maximized in these groups, much like the world we desire, in which "From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs" could be more than mere rhetoric.

We anarchists realize these are lofty goals, and if you read the writings of classical anarchists, they didn't shy away from the issue of how we would get from here-to-there: social revolution. While most of us still acknowledge that nothing short of mass revolution could dismantle capitalism and the state, many of us see the concept of "revolution" as dynamic, rather than rooted in one cataclysmic event. That is to say, we can work towards small-term gains in real time, whether building radical unions one member at a time, or raising consciousness through radical lending libraries, or educating folks on the ills of the State, exposing them to the fact that over 100 individuals in the US alone are incarcerated on the basis of their political beliefs.

Through reclaiming public space, using it for our brand of non-hierarchical politics (even if the project seems minute) we can attain a small fraction of the world we anarchists foresee. Hopefully you'll be inspired to learn a bit more about anarchism due to this pamphlet. Check out your library before straining your eyes on that damned computer. Your stack of books may also strike up an interesting conversation.

Louisville
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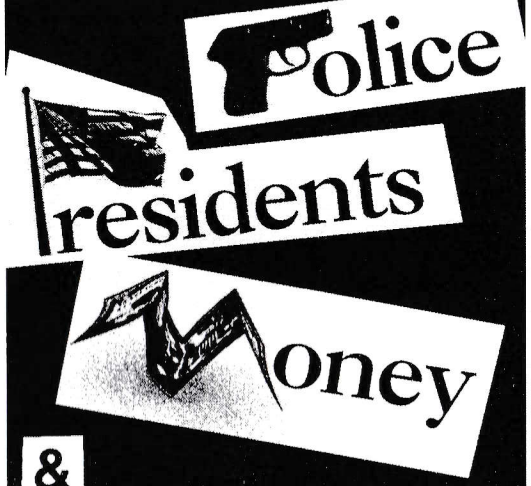
http://LAFF-experiment.org

NO BORDERS
Louisville's Radical Lending Library

http://ImagineNoBorders.org

You'd Be Better Off Without



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A Short Intro To Anarchism

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I will not give you the apocalyptic rant that you may expect from an anarchist—telling you that society is on the verge of collapse and that it's important for you to join my organization. I would simply like to share with you some of the ins and outs of this unique social theory. Chances are, first and foremost, that what you've been told in regards to anarchism is a complete farce and is quite possibly its complete opposite.

I'll go out on a limb and assume you've heard something along the lines of: "anarchist = bomb-throwing terrorist" or "anarchist society = society just the way it is minus the police." This couldn't be further from the truth.

I'm going to try to give you, reader, a great deal here, in one pamphlet. I want to tell you a bit about how this author defines anarchism, what this social theory rejects, and what it foresees as ethical alternatives.

"Anarchism? What Does That Word Even Mean?"

So I chose what may be perceived as a provocative title for this pamphlet, mentioning that you, the lovely person reading this, would likely have a safer, freer (and I'd add, more enjoyable) existence without figures like the police, buildings like banks and prisons, and economic systems that force us to compete with each other and treat our finite ecosystems like nothing more than another profit margin.

Many of these entities are assumed "natural" (a troublesome word to begin with) elements of our society that have been with us for forever. This is quite untrue. You could pick up nearly any anthropology textbook and find a different story. For instance, the human race has only been organized (and forcibly so) into nation-states for the past 200 or so years, a fraction of a percent of our history.

The atheist who lauds their own rationality, having determined there is no god, and yet retains a belief in the mythology of money, capitalism, and the state can't be said to be free of mysticism. For these too, are metaphysical social creations and relationships without material basis.

"Food costs money" or "This is Rush Limbaugh's property" are only truths because we've agreed to this mythology. Markets and private property are as mythological as any child's fantasy.

What the hell has any of this to do with anarchism? What is it anyway? Please take my words with a grain of salt, dear reader, as I assure you there have been many more before and will be many more to come that define anarchism in a different manner than I. Some will tweak this or that, others will outright reject everything i've said in this space. That being said, I rant about the essentialization of the present social realities because anarchists envision different possibilities—a society based on mutual aid instead of charity, cooperation instead of competition, equality instead of hierarchy. Anarchists want a society in which people's potentials, not profits, are maximized. While the word anarchism literally means "Without rulers," there's much more to it than this.

19th century anarchist Peter Kropotkin defined anarchism as the "no government socialism." If you've been educated in one of our fine "educational" establishments in the US, then the notion that there could be a "no government socialism" seems, perhaps, strange. You've surely been told that socialism is simply a word for "big government." This is false and absurd.

When most folks who self-identify as socialists use the term, they are referring to a system in which workers would control their own destiny and collectively own the means of production, as opposed to its being owned by a small parasitic class that earns profit from workers, while contributing nothing.

Workers controlling their own destiny and collectively owning the factories, hospitals, farms, and other production doesn't necessarily have anything to do with government. So, "no government socialism," Kropotkin's definition, is a good start. Anarchists want economic self-management.

On that note, there may be quite a bit of confusion about the second point: the abolition of government. Clearly anarchists want a society in which everyone basically does whatever the hell they want to anyone else, a "system" of chaos, right? Wrong. Anarchists want to abolish formal governments, in favor of self-governance at a local level in which folks participate in the decisions that affect their lives.

This economic self-management and political self-governance is important for a reason: anarchism desires a radical vision for equality and freedom. Without equality maximized for all, freedom becomes a farce. And anarchism sees no compromise between maximizing freedom for the group and the individual.

When we have governors who make rules that benefit the ruling class, police to enforce those rules, bosses at work, in our church, or our living spaces to internalize those rules, we will not be able to maximize equality and freedom.

In short, anarchists envision a non-hierarchical society, in which no one has power over any other individual and power and all material resources are shared equally.

"So, Anarchism is Just a Rejection of Government and Capitalism, Right?"

Wrong. Anarchism is so much more than this. It has evolved into a broad critique of domination and oppression. We might do better to define anarchism's opposition as any "power over" social relationship, i.e., any dynamic in which someone is forced, coerced, manipulated, or has to submit to an authority figure based on the fact that they are an authority figure.

There's absolutely no way one person could identify all areas of domination and oppression in one pamphlet. In fact, since oppression can be expressed in an infinite multiplicity of contexts, it would be impossible to provide an all-encompassing list of all oppressions.

Here are some more notable examples of oppression and domination that most anarchists oppose, beyond capitalism and the state: homophobia, racism, the domination of women by men (patriarchy), the destruction of the environment (which oppresses all living creatures),